



Guide to the Township No. 2 Judicial Records Tuolumne County, California

Columbia State Historic Park
Columbia, California

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Descriptive Summary

Collection Title

Township No. 2 Judicial Records, Tuolumne County, Calif., 1858-1979 (bulk 1860-1862).

Collection Number

307-1071

Collector

Columbia State Historic Park (Columbia, Calif.).

Extent

3.5 cubic feet (8 boxes)

Repository

California State Parks. Columbia State Historic Park (Columbia, Calif.).

Location of Collection

The collection is located at Columbia State Historic Park, Columbia, Calif.

Administrative Information

Access

The collection is open for research by appointment only. Appointments may be made by calling (209) 532-0150.

Publication Rights

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Processing History

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History of Township No. 2, Tuolumne County, Calif.

When the Hildreth party discovered gold in March, 1850, the legal system in Tuolumne County was still heavily influenced by the Mexican-Californio tradition of Alcaldes, who combined the duties of mayor and judge. As larger numbers of Americans moved into the area, a more recognizably American judicial system developed. By January, 1851 Joseph Carly's signature as Justice of the Peace is found on legal documents and he is mentioned as being qualified for Justice of the Peace for Township No. 2, which included Columbia, on Sept 16, 1851.

In the beginning the Justice of the Peace was elected yearly, but soon biennial elections were established. Columbia had no municipal buildings, and there was a very loose structure for locating courtrooms when needed. The town trustees rented meeting rooms and office spaces when necessary. The justices followed suit, renting suitable rooms for court activities from friends, neighbors, themselves, and in the 1930s, Judge Pitts even used his own living room. This inconvenience ended in 1939 when courtrooms were established in the Meyer - Ackerman building on the west side of Main Street, between State and Fulton, where it continued until the courts were consolidated and moved to Sonora.

The position of Justice of the Peace for Township No. 2 existed until 1954, when Justices of the Peace became Justices or Judges of the 2nd Judicial District, and served 6 years, rather than 2 year terms. In 1989 the Judicial Districts were consolidated and the court moved to Sonora, leaving the former courtroom on permanent exhibit.

Collection Scope and Content Summary

The Township No. 2 Judicial Records consist of documents (legal writs, evidence, testimony and jury decisions) for the years 1858 through 1900, and approximately 18 docket books from the 20th century. No records exist detailing the provenance of this collection. Some of the documents and the docket books in a wooden shed behind the courtroom in 1990. Some of the documents were donated by several different individuals over the years. The Conlin Family Papers, also held at Columbia State Historic Park, originally contained some judicial documents and some of them may have been added to this collection.

Besides providing information on the local judicial system, the collection illustrates the social life and values of Columbia residents--who was involved in criminal activity, who had financial problems, what kinds of disputes arose, what was considered an illegal vice or just plan rowdiness. The evidence in many civil cases includes accounts from stores, including what was a purchases necessary to sustain life or business, and reflects the difficulties residents were having making a living when the town experienced a downhill slide from prosperity to penury.

The criminal cases and supporting testimony depict the town mores and ordinances—for example, there are many cases of unlawful display of weapons, selling liquor on Sundays, and fighting, as well as the judgments made, fines ordered, bonds posted, and other activities. Another grouping of materials reveals the litigious aspects of the Tuolumne County Water Company.

The Township No. 2 Judicial Records Collection consists of only one series, docket books, which are arranged chronologically in eight 16x20x3 boxes. Within the boxes, the materials are arranged first by date, then by action, and then by plaintiff's and defendant's names, if legible. The bulk of the documents date from 1860 to 1862.

Indexing Terms

The following terms may be used to index the description of this collection:

Collection Contents

The collection has been organized by year then subdivided into civil and criminal actions. Each folder contains all documents relating to that action and has been labeled with year, month, type of action, plaintiffs and defendants.

Box 1	1858 complete, 1859 complete, 1864 complete
Box 2	1860 complete
Box 3	1861 civil
Box 4	1861 criminal
Box 5	1862 civil
Box 6	1862 criminal, 1863 both
Box 7	1865 complete, 1866 complete, assorted later years
Box 8	1886-1895, 1 docket book
Shelf	1942-1970s, 17 docket books